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Leza L Olson 08/30/2006 10:43:05 AM From DB/Inbox: Leza L Olson

Cable
Text:

S E C R E T NOFORN TEL AVIV 03441

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ACTION: POL
INFO: IMO RES ECON DCM DAO AMB AID ADM RSO CONS IPSC
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DISSEMINATION: POL
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 TEL AVIV 003441

SIPDIS

NOFORN

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA (MAHER), PM
NSC FOR GREG LOGERFO
HQ USEUCOM FOR ECJ5-E POL-MIL OFFICER (CDR KLOTHE)
JOINT STAFF FOR J-5
PENTAGON FOR OSD ISRAEL DESK OFFICER (ANDERSON)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/28/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MASS](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAELI DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE ANALYSTS ON THE
ISRAEL-HIZBALLAH WAR

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones. Reasons; 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (S/NF) On August 24, a group of Israeli Defense Intelligence (IDI) analysts briefed visiting Senate Foreign Relations Committee senior staffer Puneet Talwar on the IDI's preliminary assessment of the 34-day war between Israel and Hizballah in southern Lebanon. The IDI team was lead by Colonel Amit Avoram, and included Major Gil (head of IDI's Hamas Desk), Major Dan (head of IDI's Lebanon Desk), an officer responsible for nonproliferation issues, and a lieutenant colonel. The meeting was recorded on tape.

¶2. (S/NF) The IDI team made the following points:

¶A. Hizballah is concerned about the strengthening of Lebanon's statehood, and the international community's increasing presence in Lebanon. Israel has no illusions that the GOL will disarm Hizballah.

¶B. Lebanese PM Siniora is doing what he can to support the

international community's efforts to stabilize and positively change the situation in Lebanon. He feels -- mistakenly, in the analysts' views -- that he needs to resolve the Shebaa Farms issue and demarcate Lebanon's border with Israel in order to remove Hizballah's raison d'etre. Israel believes that Hizballah, in this case, would continue to exist, as it is a strategic arm of Iran.

1C. It does not appear that Iran ordered the July 12 kidnapping of the IDF soldiers that started the war. It is not clear that the war benefited Iran in any way. Iran felt compelled to help Hizballah during the war, and sent supplies to the terrorist organization by air and sea.

1D. The IDF substantially degraded Hizballah's medium- and long-range missile and rocket capabilities, but did not significantly degrade its short-range rocket capability. Hizballah probably retains 6,000-8,000 short-range rockets. Hizballah's command and control structure remains intact. Its headquarters and offices in Dahiya suffered significant damage, although Hizballah is rebuilding what it can. Most of its known bunkers and ground positions in southern Lebanon were destroyed. Around 500 Hizballah fighters were killed. Airstrikes in Dahiya shook up Hizballah's image of invincibility as a "state within a state." Airstrikes in the north against roads and trucks helped to interdict re-supply of Hizballah from Syria. Israel has evidence that Syria supplied sophisticated Russian-made anti-tank guided missiles to Hizballah.

END SUMMARY.

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IDI'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE SITUATION IN LEBANON
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13. (S/NF) IDI Lebanon Desk Officer Major Dan began his briefing by cautioning that each side of the Israel-Hizballah conflict is creating its own account of the war. In the IDI's view, Hizballah is in an inferior position as compared to where it stood prior to the war. It has not, however, been militarily degraded in a significant way. The IDI sees a general trend in Lebanon that is leading towards a major change in Hizballah's strategic environment. The trend begins with the assassination of former Lebanese PM Hariri, moves to the international community's call on Syria to withdraw its army from Lebanon, and stops, for now, with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) deploying into southern Lebanon. Major Dan claimed that Hizballah is concerned by the following:

A) Lebanon's statehood is growing stronger. Israel has no illusions that the LAF will disarm Hizballah. Still, the LAF represents the state, and its extension into southern Lebanon is a challenge to Hizballah. IDI sees a growing debate within the political class in Lebanon. The Druze leader, Walid Jumblatt, for instance, is speaking out now about whether Lebanon should follow the "Hanoi model" represented by Hizballah (e.g., hunker down and fight) or the "Hong Kong model" (e.g., promote economic development and quietly resist). Non-Shiites are supporting a new order with a more western orientation and peaceful agenda and an eye towards solving problematic disputes. The IDI analysts were careful to caution that this is currently only an oral debate, and that the possibility for violence is still present. Major Dan said that Hizballah is being pushed into a corner, and may feel the need to defend itself if it is pushed further. He claimed that many in Lebanon are saying that Hizballah made a strategic mistake.

B) The international community is getting more involved in Lebanon. The IDI analysts were careful to point out that Hizballah believes that it can cope with a foreign presence in Lebanon. According to the analysts, Hizballah was afraid of a multinational force when there was thought that it might be able to act according to Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. Hizballah, the analysts explained, had become accustomed to UNIFIL soldiers serving as "notetakers." Hizballah did not

relish the prospect of having to face UN soldiers authorized to use force. The analysts said that as it appears that the soldiers being sent as part of the enhanced UNIFIL do not have the ability to act under Chapter 7, Hizballah is less concerned. As for the LAF, the analysts said that they believe Hizballah feels it can cope with the LAF presence in southern Lebanon, especially as there are many Shiites within the LAF's ranks.

THE IDI'S VIEW OF LEBANESE PM SINIORA

¶4. (S/NF) The analysts characterized Lebanese PM Siniora as very supportive and aware that international involvement in Lebanon is important. They said he understands that the GOL cannot challenge Hizballah. Hizballah is inflaming this fear, portraying a worst-case scenario marked by a return to the sectarian violence of the 1980's. IDI believes that Hizballah does not want this to happen, but would prefer chaos to being disarmed.

¶5. (S/NF) In the analysts' view, Siniora needs backing against Hizballah, Iran and Syria. Siniora is trying to solve disputes with Syria, including the border demarcation issue, and Shebaa Farms. The analysts said that Siniora believes that he needs to remove Shebaa Farms as an excuse for Hizballah's existence. Colonel Avoram stressed that in Israel's view, the Shebaa Farms issue is a pretext. After Israel withdrew from Lebanon in 2000, the Syrians and Lebanese manufactured the issue to legitimize Hizballah's existence. If the Shebaa Farms issue were resolved, Hizballah would find other pretexts. In the IDI's view, Hizballah is a strategic arm of Iran. Iran would not surrender Hizballah if the Shebaa Farms issue were resolved.

IDI'S VIEW OF THE ROLE OF IRAN IN THE WAR

¶6. (S/NF) The IDI analysts said that they do not believe that Iran ordered the kidnapping of the IDF soldiers on a date certain, although they said that Iran supports Hizballah's activities at a strategic and more principled level. In the IDI's view, they are not sure that Iran was pleased with the timing of the kidnapping. When the fighting started, however, Iran had to support Hizballah any way that it could.

It supported Hizballah with supplies that went through Syria to the terrorist group. Iran provided intelligence, financial backing and political support to Hizballah before and during the war.

¶7. (S/NF) On the question of the timing of the attack, one analyst noted that it took place around the time of the G-8 Summit in St. Petersburg -- a summit that was to discuss Middle East issues including Iran's nuclear program. The analyst said that he could not say with 100 percent certainty, but it seemed that Iranian Supreme National Security Council Head Ali Larijani was in Damascus one day before Hizballah's kidnapping on July 12 of two Israeli soldiers -- the event that sparked off the war.

¶8. (S/NF) One analyst claimed that Iran used sea routes and the Beirut International Airport to transfer cargoes to Hizballah. (NOTE: He did not specify when these routes were used. END NOTE.) He said that IDI does not know what the cargoes contained, and noted that using these routes was more difficult than smuggling weapons or supplies into Lebanon via trails crossing the Syria-Lebanon border. The analyst speculated that it might be that problems transferring cargoes through Syria forced Hizballah to use sea routes and the airport. He added that some cargoes may have been transferred by sea due to their size.

IDI ASSESSMENT OF DAMAGE TO HIZBALLAH

¶9. (S/NF) Colonel Avoram said that Hizballah has not been

militarily knocked out. Hizballah suffered a severe blow to its medium- and long-range rocket capability, as most of the launchers for these rockets were destroyed either in the Israeli Air Force's first strikes, or in later airstrikes. As to the short-range rockets, the colonel said that Israel managed to attack some places where rockets were placed, but IDI concludes that Israel did not substantially degrade Hizballah's short-range rocket capability. He said that Hizballah managed to keep 6,000-8,000 such rockets. The colonel added that there were thousands of 132 mm rockets in Lebanon prior to the war's start, and that Israel had a hard time targeting them. The colonel acknowledged that there is an ongoing debate in the IDF on how to deal with these weapons.

¶10. (S/NF) Regarding the Zilzal and other long-range rockets, the colonel said that Israel succeeded in destroying "a lot" of them, but admitted that not all were destroyed, and that Hizballah maintains a "residual capability" to use these weapons.

¶11. (S/NF) The colonel said that Hizballah maintained its command and control throughout the 34-day war, and still possesses its command and control capability.

¶12. (S/NF) The colonel said that Israel managed to destroy most of Hizballah's bunkers and positions on the ground. He said that IDI had "general knowledge" about Hizballah's infrastructure and the location of the main bunkers. He claimed that all of them were built with Iran's help after Israel withdrew from Lebanon in 2000. The bunkers were built out of concrete and usually contained a few rooms that held ammunition and rocket launchers. The colonel described how Hizballah fighters could launch rockets from the bunkers and then retreat back inside to safety. He noted that the bunkers were camouflaged.

¶13. (S/NF) The colonel claimed that the IDF killed about 500 Hizballah fighters, and that Hizballah was hiding the truth about the number of casualties.

¶14. (S/NF) The IDI analysts said that the bombing of the southern Beirut suburb of Dahiya destroyed Hizballah's headquarters and severely damaged the organization's offices. They noted that Hizballah has been portraying itself as a "state within a state," and claimed that, as a result of the IAF's bombing campaign, this concept has been shaken. The analysts acknowledged, however, that Hizballah is already rebuilding those offices that it could salvage.

¶15. (S/NF) The colonel said that the IAF's bombing campaign in northern Lebanon helped to interdict the re-supply of Hizballah by trucks traveling on roads crossing from Syria into Lebanon. He said that although the IDI had information that Hizballah was using roads in the north for a re-supply effort during the war, the IDI did not know exactly what kind of supplies were entering Lebanon, but assumed they were ammunition and rockets. The colonel stressed that 220 mm and 302 mm rockets from Syria are very destructive, and claimed that Hizballah had problems with the launchers for those rockets: "Perhaps they were trying to get the launchers for those rockets. Perhaps they were trying to stock up on anti-tank guided missiles. We know Hizballah received from the Syrians the best Russian anti-tank guided missiles, including the Kornet and Konkurs missiles. We have clear-cut evidence of this, and we think they received some of these during the war. Hizballah also had some older French missiles." The colonel said that the IAF tried to hit most of the bypasses and the trucks traveling on the roads. He added that at the beginning of the war, many trucks were hit, and there were secondary explosions.

¶16. (S/NF) Senate Foreign Relations Committee senior staffer Puneet Talwar did not have the opportunity to clear on this cable.

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JONES